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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, May 27, 2022, at 9 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2022

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TINA SMITH, a Senator from the State of Minnesota.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal redeemer, the Father of mercies, You are our help in time of need. Lord, as we mourn the senseless tragedy at Robb Elementary School in Texas, guide us with Your grace.

Lord, sometimes prayers seem so useless. Yet in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, You told us to pray without ceasing. We lift our voices again to You. We pray because You have helped us in the past. We pray because You are our hope for the years to come. Strengthen us to pray and work until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Inspire our lawmakers to strive to become islands of mercy in the midst of a sea of indifference. Lord, use our Senators to build a more safe nation and world.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 25, 2022.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TINA SMITH, a Senator from the State of Minnesota, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. SMITH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, there is a plague—a plague—upon this Nation, a plague of gun violence that has taken over this country. Two weeks ago, that plague claimed the lives of 10 Black Americans who were

massacred in broad daylight while shopping at a grocery store in Buffalo. They were Black, and they were in a grocery store. That is the reason they were shot by an 18-year-old with an AR-15.

And then, yesterday, just 10 days after Buffalo, that plague struck again in Uvalde, TX, where 19—19—innocent children and 2 teachers were gunned down at Robb Elementary in the middle of the school day, just before the start of summer when these kids were looking forward to having such a wonderful time with their family and friends.

Gone. They are gone.

The shooter crashed his truck near the school, overpowered the police already at the scene, and reportedly began shooting inside a fourth grade classroom. Nineteen kids, two teachers, forever gone in the blink of an eye.

America's gun epidemic is unmatched by any of our peer nations in the world. No American is safe from it, and the American people are sick and tired of it. But we also have a problem—a big problem—here in the U.S. Senate—a big problem in the U.S. Senate. The problem in the Senate is simple: Too many Members on the other side of the aisle are disconnected from the suffering of the American people. Too many Members on that side care more about the NRA than they do about families who grieve victims of gun violence.

As I said, the American people are sick and tired of mass shootings. They are sick and tired about active shooter alerts. They are sick and tired of children—children: 9-year-olds, 10-year-

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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olds, 11-year-olds—being shot, gunned down in their schools.

When I read the news of yesterday's shooting, I ached for the families and then thought: What if it was one of my children? I imagined what I would feel if this happened to one of them. The mere thought—just thinking about it—was a gut punch in my stomach. The fear sent ripples down my spine.

To my Republican colleagues: Imagine if it happened to you. Imagine if this was your kid or your grandkid. How would you feel? Could you ever forgive yourself for not supporting a simple law that would make these mass shootings less likely?

Please, please, please—damn it—put yourself in the shoes of these parents for once. Maybe that thought, putting yourself in the shoes of these parents instead of in the arms of the NRA, might let you wriggle free from the viselike grip of the NRA, might free you to act on even a simple measure for the sake of these children—these 9-year-olds, these 10-year-olds, these 11-year-olds, these beautiful children. Please—damn it—think if it were your child or grandchild.

Now, Madam President, it wasn't always this way in Congress. Nearly 30 years ago, I was proud to be the author of the Brady Bill and a leader of the assault weapons bans. These were major legislative accomplishments, and they worked because they were good, commonsense laws, and they passed because both sides of the aisle worked together. And because they became law, tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands, perhaps—of lives were saved: children, elderly people, people of color, you name it, people now walking the streets who might have been dead had we not passed these laws. But today the NRA has made it all but impossible for even the bare minimum to move forward in Congress, and the other side is all too ready to bow in obeisance to the NRA, in service of their whims.

Madam President, these types of shootings used to be rare—so rare, in fact, that each occurrence stood apart as a singular event. But now these shootings happen so frequently that the Nation can barely keep up, barely mourn the 10 people shot in the grocery store in Buffalo before being rocked to our collective core by the slaughter of 19 elementary schoolchildren in the predominantly Latino community of Uvalde, TX.

These shootings happen everywhere: movie theaters, churches, synagogues, concerts, nightclubs, grocery stores, college campuses, high schools, elementary schools—elementary schools, with beautiful children getting ready to move out into the prime of life.

Honestly, I thought Sandy Hook 30 years ago would be the breaking point. I thought that that would be the tragedy that forced Republicans to examine their conscience and think: Oh, God, we can't allow schoolchildren to be slaughtered.

Well, I was wrong. The slaughter of 20 elementary schoolchildren in Sandy Hook didn't move them. We heard about their thoughts and their prayers—but no action. Then came Aurora. And the Navy Yard. Then, after Charleston, I thought: Maybe this—maybe this is the moment. Nine Americans shot in a church during Bible study? This has to move the Republicans here in the Senate.

Nope. It didn't. They gave a few more thoughts, a few more prayers, no real effort to solve the problem.

So, Madam President, it continued on and on and on: San Bernardino; Orlando; Las Vegas; Sutherland Springs; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School; Thousand Oaks; the Pittsburgh synagogue; Santa Fe, TX; the El Paso Walmart; Dayton; Virginia Beach; Boulder; Buffalo; and now Uvalde.

When will it end? We must act to have it end, not thoughts and prayers—action.

After the shootings in El Paso and Dayton 3 years ago, the Republican leader promised that red flag laws and background checks would be front and center in a Senate debate. He was then majority leader, but then the Republicans did nothing. They ensured there was no debate, just as they wanted. They don't want to debate this issue. Indeed, all we hear from Republicans are thoughts, prayers. And now there is a new phrase. Now some of my Republican colleagues want to "lift up" the community. That sounds heartening, but it does absolutely nothing—nothing—to prevent the next family from having to grieve their loss, and it won't do a single damn thing to prevent another life from being taken. It won't do a single damn thing to prevent another child from being shot at school—a 9-year-old, a 10-year-old, an 11-year-old—beautiful children.

Madam President, you may have noticed that when they aren't offering thoughts and prayers to distract from their inaction, many of my Republican colleagues focus on the motives of the shooters instead of focusing on the obvious common denominator. They talk about the real villain being mental illness and say nothing of the fact that we are a nation suffocated by firearms. Rates of mental illness are more or less the same across the developed world. The United States is not an outlier on mental illness, but we are an outlier in the sheer number of guns available in this country. That is why we have so many shootings and other Western countries don't. If mental illness were the simple cause, you would see mass shootings happening all over the developed world, but you don't.

What you do see here in America are enough guns to give every man, woman, and child in this Nation a firearm and still have nearly 70 million guns left over. What you do see is that it is far too easy for people to access weapons in this country and then to use them to slaughter people, to slaughter children by the dozens—by the dozens.

Again, America doesn't stand out when it comes to the rate of mental illness, but we are unique among the world's developed nations in that today, the leading cause of death among children is no longer a car accident; it is no longer illness or malnourishment. The leading cause of death among children is a firearm. The leading cause of death of children—do you hear that, my Republican colleagues?—is a firearm.

Clearly, many of these shooters had different motives, but at the end of the day, does the motive really matter to the family with an empty seat at their dinner table? Children who lost parents don't just care whether the shooter was mentally ill; they care that the shooter had ready access to a gun. Spouses who lost their partners don't just care that the shooter had a grudge or an agenda or a grievance; they care that the shooter had ready access to a gun. Americans who lost friends and co-workers and parishioners, who lost fellow worshippers don't just care whether the shooter wrote a manifesto; they care that the shooter had ready access to a gun. They care that their loved ones had been taken from them by someone who had access to a gun—taken from them while some Members of this body refuse to do what it takes to prevent those losses, refuse to focus on the denominator to every single one of these shootings, refuse to even do the bare minimum as they bow in obeisance to the wretched NRA.

What do we do about it? If the slaughter of schoolchildren can't convince the Republicans to buck the NRA, what can we do? There are some who want this body to quickly vote on sensible gun safety legislation—legislation supported by the vast majority of Americans, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike. They want to see this body vote quickly so the American people can know which side each Senator is on—which side each Senator is on.

I am sympathetic to that, and I believe that accountability votes are important. But, sadly, this isn't a case of the American people not knowing where their Senators stand. They know. They know because my Republican colleagues are perfectly clear on this issue, crystal clear. Republicans don't pretend that they support sensible gun safety legislation. They don't pretend to be moved by the fact that 90 percent of Americans, regardless of party, support something as common sense as background checks, that the vast majority of gun owners support the background checks bill. They don't pretend that they want to keep guns out of the hands of those who might use weapons to shoot concertgoers or movie watchers or worshippers or shoppers or children. They don't pretend at all.

Just listen to them when they show up in obeisance to the NRA at the NRA's convention in Houston—the same State as Uvalde—on Friday. They

will offer their thoughts and prayers. They will say they want to lift up the community. And then they will go back to their smoke-filled rooms and ensure the NRA and gun manufacturers that nothing will change, that they have the NRA's back.

No, Madam President, no, this isn't a case of Republicans hiding their position. They proudly tell the American people which side they are on, and America is much worse off for it. And if nothing does change, we are condemned to find ourselves right here once again very, very soon.

As I was reading the reports of the tragedy in Texas, I saw that Amanda Gorman, the young woman who mesmerized the Nation at President Biden's inauguration, tweeted:

The truth is, one nation under guns.

"One nation under guns." That is simply heartbreaking—to think that this is the legacy that older generations are leaving behind for young Americans: "one nation under guns."

It doesn't have to be that way. Our parents don't need to drop their kids off at school and wonder if their kid will be next. That is in the thoughts of millions of moms and dads right now. Our citizens don't have to endure the fear of getting groceries while constantly keeping an eye behind their backs. Again, millions of Americans are worried about that right now.

Americans can make a choice. Americans can reject the Republican "guns at all cost" doctrine, obedience to the NRA, not even voting for the most simple, sensitive, positive, and popular gun legislation. Americans can cast their vote in November for Senators or Members of Congress who reflect how he or she stands with guns, with this issue—this issue—at the top of the voters' lists.

In the meantime, my Republican colleagues can work with us now. I know this is a slim prospect—very slim, all too slim. We have been burned so many times before. But this is so important, and I have such a firm belief—taught to me by my late father, who passed away in November—that if you do the right thing and persist, justice will eventually prevail. But you have to keep persisting, and we will.

For that reason alone, we must pursue action and even ask Republicans again to join us—maybe, maybe, maybe. Unlikely. We have been burned in the past. But their hearts might see what is happening and join us and do the right thing. They know it is the right thing. They can work with us to craft legislation that would prevent needless loss of life. It is their choice.

As majority leader, I haven't been shy about putting bipartisan legislation on the floor for a vote, but bipartisan means both parties must engage in crafting a bill, like what happened in the House and Senate 30 years ago with the Brady law and the assault weapons ban.

Democrats have been trying to work hard with Republicans—Senator MUR-

PHY, Senator MANCHIN—on legislation that will eventually pass and become law. The other side has refused. There are so many options available to us, so many ideas. We just need some brave Republicans to stand before history and yell "stop," to think, if it was your child, your grandchild, how you would feel. Would that move you to do something—something—about this plague of guns?

Like my colleague Senator MURPHY, I refuse to believe that we cannot find a path forward. Make no mistake about it, if we can't find a good, strong bill that has bipartisan support, we will continue to pursue this issue on our own. We have no choice. It is too important. Lives are at stake.

I accept the fact that most of my Republican colleagues are not willing to do what it takes to prevent this needless loss of life. The NRA will have a hold on them. That is just a reality, unfortunately. But it is unacceptable to the American people to think that there are not 10 of my Republican colleagues, just 10—1 out of 5 over here—who would be ready to work to pass something that would reduce this plague of gun violence.

It is unacceptable that there are not 10 Members of the Republican caucus willing to save lives, find a way to do it. Yet that is where we are. That is where we are. Another week, another American community devastated by a mass shooting. All of us thinking of these 9- and 10- and 11-year-old children just shot, gone. Another American community, Uvalde, which will never recover, like the other communities before it. Will it be yet—Uvalde—another example of Republicans unwilling to do what it takes to keep Americans safe?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 3807, H.R. 3967, H.R. 6833, H.R. 8, AND H.R. 1446

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I understand there are five bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the titles of the bills for the second time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3807) to amend the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to increase appropriations to the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 3967) to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 6833) to amend title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act, the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to establish requirements with respect to cost-sharing for certain insulin products, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 8) to require a background check for every firearm sale.

A bill (H.R. 1446) to amend chapter 44 of title 18, United States Code, to strengthen the background check procedures to be fol-

lowed before a Federal firearms licensee may transfer a firearm to a person who is not such a licensee.

Mr. SCHUMER. In order to place these bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceeding en bloc.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objections having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTING

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, our country is sickened and outraged by the senseless evil that struck Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX, only yesterday. According to early reports from authorities, it appears that a deranged young man tried to murder his own grandmother, then crashed his car, and then ran into an elementary school and began killing.

At least 19 young children and 2 teachers were murdered—murdered—for no apparent reason at all. These innocent kids were simply going to school. They put on their backpacks, said goodbye to their parents, and headed off for another day of learning and friendship. There were only 2 days left before summer break. And because of this maniac, at least 19 of these kids never made it home.

One of the victims was a 10-year-old girl whose father described her as "full of life, a jokester, always smiling." A 10-year-old boy who loved sports and art had just received his honor roll certificate a few hours earlier. His mother says he was thrilled—thrilled—about moving up into middle school next year.

It is literally sickening—sickening—to consider the innocent young lives that were stolen by this pointless, senseless brutality; to consider the parents and families who sat waiting at the civic center, waiting to either be reunited with their son or their daughter or to learn they never would be.

The investigation is still underway. The authorities will continue to learn exactly what happened and how. In the meantime, we are also praying for the Border Patrol officer who, according to reports, was wounded after he responded to the scene, and for all the law enforcement, paramedics, and first responders whose dedication yesterday saved lives.

Most of all, the entire Nation's hearts are broken for the victims and for their families. Words simply fail.

Yesterday, the Uvalde school superintendent said:

We're a small community [and] we're going to need your prayers to get us through this.

We pray fervently that in the midst of this nightmare of grief, our Heavenly Father will make manifest to